

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0058

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS PFOR MOPS LA VN TH
SUBJECT: REPORT OF VIETNAMESE TROOPS ON THAI BORDER

1. A LAO TRUCK DRIVER WHO ARRIVED IN VIENTIANE FROM
PAKSE THREE WEEKS AGO TOLD A LAO STUDENT WHO IN TURN
TOLD EMBOFF JANUARY 9, 1977 THAT THERE WAS AT LEAST
ONE BATTALION OF VIETNAMESE SOLDIERS IN CAMPS SPREAD
ALONG THE MEKONG RIVER BETWEEN SE BANG FAI, SOUTH OF
THAKHEK, AND A POINT THIRTY KILOMETERS NORTH OF
SAVANNAKHET. THE TRUCK DRIVER REPORTEDLY SAID HE SAW
ABOUT TEN TRACKED VEHICLES AND MANY GUNS HE DESCRIBED
AS "BIG". HE NOTED TO STUDENT THAT THE GUNS WERE
TRAINED ACROSS THE MEKONG RIVER.

2. A SEPARATE LAO SOURCE RESIDENT IN VIENTIANE TOLD
EMBOFF THE SAME DAY THAT HE HAD BEEN TOLD BY A LAO
PILOT THAT SEVERAL THOUSAND VIETNAMESE TROOPS WERE
STATIONED AT DONG HENE (WD3146) AS OF EARLY JANUARY.
THIS IS THE SITE OF AN OLD FRENCH MILITARY CAMP JUST
WEST OF SAVANNAKHET. THE PILOT, WHO HAD BEEN BASED IN
PAKSE UNTIL HIS TRANSFER TO VIENTIANE JANUARY 6, ALSO
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REPORTEDLY SAID THAT VIETNAMESE TROOPS DRESSED IN LAO
UNIFORMS WERE STATIONED INSIDE THE TOWN OF PAKSE.

3. THE VIETNAMESE TROOPS NORTH OF SAVANNAKEHT
REPORTEDLY TOLD THE TRUCK DRIVER THAT THEY HAD COME TO
HELP THE LAO FLUSH OUT THE RESISTANCE MOVEMENT.

4. THE DRIVER SAID HE HAD BEEN FRIGHTENED BY THE VIETNAMESE AFTER THEY STOPPED AND QUESTIONED HIM FOR SEVERAL HOURS. THE REPORTEDLY ACCUSED HIM OF BEING A SPY FOR THE RESISTANCE FORCES BECAUSE HE SLOWED HIS TRUCK TO LOOK AT THE VIETNAMESE CAMPS. THE STUDENT RUEFULLY REMAKED TO EMBOFF, "NOW WE LAO ARE ACCUSED OF BEING SPIES IN OUR OWN COUNTRY BY FOREIGN TROOPS."

5. ALTHOUGH EMBOFF SPOKE DIRECTLY WITH THE TRUCK DRIVER HE WOULD NOT DISCUSS THE DEPLOYMENT OF VIETNAMESE TROOPS ALONG THE MEKONG. HE DID TELL EMBOFF, HOWEVER, THAT ROUTE 13 FROM PAKSE TO VIENTIANE WAS VULNERABLE AND OFTEN ATTACKED BY RESISTANCE FORCES. HE SAID THAT DURING THE ENTIRE TRIP, A PROTECTIVE CONVOY OF LPLA SOLDIERS WAS REQUIRED ONLY FOR THE STRETCH BETWEEN SAVANNAKHET AND THAKHEK. HE WAS PART OF A CARAVAN OF TRUCKS WHICH BROUGHT COFFEE FROM PAKSE TO VIENTIANE AND ARE TO TRANSPORT GASOLINE BACK. THE TRUCK DRIVER FLASHED A WORRED LOOK AS HE ADDED THAT HE DREADED THE DANGEROUS TRIP HOME.

6. COMMENT: WE NOTE THAT THE LPLA ONLY REQUIRED THAT THE COMMERICAL CARAVAN BE ESCORTED BY LAO TROOPS ALONG ROUTE 13 THROUGH THE REGION IN WHICH SRV TROOPS WERE DEPLOYED. THE INTENT MAY HAVE BEEN TO LIMIT OBSERVATION OF THE SRV DEPLOYMENT (PARA 4) RATHER THAN TO PROTECT THE CARAVAN.

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